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ABSTRACT

The impact of higher education leaders on policy and program implementation at the state house and the priorities of 32 governors were studied in 1986. The report is based on survey responses from these governors plus supplementary interviews. Interviews were also conducted with a recent former governor, a state legislator, and a congressman to help analyze preliminary survey findings. The survey data indicate that the state governors have established educational improvements as a high priority, have developed a wide range of initiatives to implement these priorities, and have been substantially successful in selling their programs to their state legislatures. The results also show: the limited influence of college leaders on state higher education policy; and the fact that a new policy development apparatus is forming independent of the nation's higher education leaders. Based on the survey and interviews, suggestions include: college leaders must pay more attention to broader state issues; a college's public image can be shaped, in part, by having its president use the executive office to speak out on public issues; and colleges should consider a team approach in interacting with state governments. The nine survey questions and the governors' responses are presented, along with a list of participating states. (SW)

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A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP:

OR, TO WHOM ARE THE GOVERNORS LISTENING?

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Introduction and Summary

In *Presidents Make a Difference*, (1985), Clark Kerr and his associates assert that the leaders of America's societal institutions—mayors, corporate officers, union officials, and university presidents—are increasingly limited in their ability to provide real leadership. The following study of governors' information sources seems to document Kerr's conclusions in that it reveals the very limited influence higher education leaders now enjoy in their state capitals.

This report, based on survey responses from thirty-five of the nation's governors plus supplemental interviews, uncovered a number of illuminating facts about the priorities of governors and presents some surprising data on the impact of higher education leaders on policy and program implementation at the state house.

- Governors consider educational improvement at all levels to be their office's highest priority: *47* percent of the governors put education on the top of their agenda, while another *46* percent listed education among their administration's three highest priorities.
- At the same time, college and university presidents, as well as statewide higher education boards and their heads, are not seen by the governors as resources for ideas on educational initiatives, policies, or programs: state higher education boards or their chief executives were listed as inner circle advisors by only eight governors, and only five counted college and university heads among their top three advisors.
- As a corollary, the survey revealed that gubernatorial reliance for ideas and advice on special assistants, state *ad hoc* task forces and commissions, and certain national organizations is increasing.
- Conspicuously absent from the lists of advisors and information sources are the national higher education associations headquartered in Washington, D.C.: for the governors, the most important national associations are the Education Commission of the States and the National Governors' Association—institutions largely controlled by the governors.
- Surprisingly, governors are more likely to read *Education Week*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and ECS documents than any other educational publications.
- The governors reported instituting a wide range of educational initiatives, including quality initiatives, faculty salary improvements, and business partnership/economic development activities. At the bottom of the list of agenda items, attracting very limited gubernatorial interest, were restraining student fees, reorganizing higher education, and supporting state level boards.

The idea for this study germinated in the spring of 1986 when George Johnson, president of George Mason University, related to the authors that members of the state relations committee of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities were asking "just who are the governors listening to?" Implicit in this question is the belief that governors, regardless of who they do listen to, don't listen to higher education leaders when they need advice and ideas on higher education. A shift in the focus of educational policy making from the nation's capital to the state houses, coupled with the emergence of a new generation of governors committed to improving educational institutions in the interest of economic development, has made the answer to this question increasingly important.

While confirming that governors are not looking to college and university presidents for advice, the survey also raises a more troubling and fundamental question: Are higher education's current leaders failing to provide the societal leadership at the state and national levels that their roles require? Leadership, and its 'ack, is becoming increasingly critical for America's colleges and universities, in areas ranging from the pursuit of excellence to the proper role of auxiliary programs such as athletics—and now in areas such as public policy development, particularly at the state level. [For example, earlier Center for Policy Studies in Education at George Mason University studies reveal the critical importance of strong leadership in moving a college or university to new levels of effectiveness or excellence (*Searching for Academic Excellence*, Gilley et al, Macmillan, 1986); and, that failures of presidential leadership are a prime factor in the intercollegiate athletics crisis facing American higher education (*Administration of*

University Athletic Programs: Internal Control and Excellence, Gilley and Hickey, ACE/George Mason University, 1986).]

Are college and university leaders being viewed in the state capitals as special interest lobbyists instead of as societal resources? And what about the national picture?

Recently, two observers of the nation's capital with unique perspectives, Robert Rosenzweig, president of the Association of American Universities, and Amy Schwartz, of the *Washington Post* editorial page, offered some disquieting views on higher education and national policy which parallel our findings at the state level.

Particularly disturbing was Schwartz's November 8, 1986 column on the *Washington Post* editorial page where she raised the issue of whether universities are acting like every other special interest and reported a growing hostility on the part of congressmen, congressional staff and others in Washington, D.C. to the higher education establishment. Schwartz castigated higher education leaders for their role in the debates surrounding tax reform, mandatory retirement, and government spending. She accuses colleges and universities of "not wanting to play by the rules" and "always seeking special treatment," whatever the question.

Writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* "Point of View" column one day after the 1986 elections (November 5), Rosenzweig sounded an alarm about how universities are coming to be viewed in Washington, D. C. and concluded his article with the following paragraph:

> Universities are viewed differently from the way they used to be and from the way we view ourselves, and the differences are troublesome. It would be easy to say that we have an "image" problem, but I would prefer to say that we have a reality problem. Much has changed in institutions and the context in which they operate, and those changes are now being felt in the political and policy arenas. It is essential that we understand that fact and govern our individual and collective actions accordingly if we are to retain the confidence on which the future success of universities will depend.

This study, by revealing the limited impact of college presidents, chancellors, and state directors on the development of state policies and programs, may be very helpful. It reveals weakness, but by identifying state government decision and information loops, this report raises hopes for increasing higher education's influence in the state houses, and recommends several strategies for putting higher education's leaders and the university back at the forefront of public policy development and into their rightful societal leadership roles.

If, as Rosenzweig contends, higher education has a "reality" problem rather than an "image" problem, then the place for public universities to begin the process of change is at home—in their state capitals. Only then can they hope to avert a negative tide of opinion beginning to run strong in the American political consciousness.

The Survey

Beginning in May, 1986, a nine-question survey form was constructed and pilot-tested. The survey form was then sent, along with a cover letter, to all fifty state governors in June, 1986, with a follow-up mailing in July.

By September 1, thirty-five governors had responded. One referred the survey to another elected official, another declined to be included, a third sent a copy of his education plan, but thirty-two returned a completed survey. (See page 6 for for the list of states whose governors responded.)

The nine survey questions and the governors' responses are listed below. Responses to non-ranking questions are tabulated by frequency of mention without regard to priority.

"Who is(are) your chief higher education policy advisor(s)?" (The governors were provided with three blanks numbered one through three; nine governors listed three advisors, none listed more than three, and the rest named one (usually) or two.)

Gubernatorial staff assistants	26
State higher education boards/heads	8
Presidents	5
Others	2

"What national/regional organizations best serve your information needs regarding higher education policy and programs?"

Education Commission of the States	20
National Governors' Association	12
Southern Regional Education Board	6
State boards	1
Carnegie Forum	1
(College and university boards)	0

"Where have your best ideas for higher education come from?" The responses based on frequency of mention are tabulated below.

Universities	8
(faculty)	(6)
(presidents)	(2)
State boards	8
(governing)	(5)
(coordinating)	(3)
Staff assistants	5
State task forces	5
National Governors' Association	2
Southern Regional Education Board	2

"Which higher education-oriented publications are you most likely to read?"

Education Week	10
Chronicle of Higher Education	9
State publications	8
ECS publications	6
Phi Delta Kappan	5
Change	3

"Which education meeting are you most likely to attend in the course of a year?"

Education Commission of the States	12
National Governors' Association	11
Various state education meetings	9
SREB	6

"Do you have an education policy advisor on your staff? If so, what is his/her title?"

Yes	28
No	1
No response	6

Four governors reported more than one education policy advisor on their staffs. Titles for these individuals ranged from "policy analyst" to "executive assistant" to "special assistant for higher education."

"Are you actively undertaking higher education initiatives? If so, what are they (list three)?" (Responses varied both in substance and terminology, but basically could be classified as follows.)

Various quality improvement initiatives	13
Increased funding, e.g., faculty salaries	9
High tech/business partnerships	7
Reorganization of state higher education	5
Student fee restraint	4
Support for coordinating board	2

"How do educational initiatives rate when compared to other demands on your time and attention?"

The highest priority	15
In the top three priorities	14
In the top ten	3

"Has the legislature appropriated sufficient funds to implement your priorities?"

Yes	18
Partially	7
No	7

The Governors Reply

The survey data indicate that the state governors have established educational improvements as a high priority; have developed a wide range of initiatives to implement these priorities; and have been substantially successful in selling their programs to their state legislatures. This finding tends to confirm conventional wisdom that states have been more active and that the focus on educational improvements that radiated from the nation's capital for much of the 1960s and 1970s is now shifting to the state houses in the 1980s.

Efforts of Thomas Kean of New Jersey and Charles Robb of Virginia to inject new life into the Education Commission of the States have been substantially successful. Governors now see the ECS as a place with good ideas, and valuable publications, and are willing to take time from their schedules to attend ECS annual meetings—proof of the growing reputation of an organization in trouble just a few years ago.

Colleges and universities, however, have grounds for concern over the survey results because they: show their own leaders' limited influence on state higher education policy; demonstrate that state legislatures appear to be less enthusiastic about gubernatorial higher education initiatives (and perhaps higher education) than are governors; and clearly prove that a new policy development apparatus is taking shape independent of the nation's higher education leadership. College and university presidents may be preoccupied with day-to-day issues and internal pressures; whatever the reason, there is an evident lapse of leadership, one that could seriously affect the future of higher education and, perhaps, even that of the nation itself.

This study raises several important questions regarding higher education leadership today. For example, there is a growing national consensus behind the idea that improving America's educational system is crucial to sustaining the country's economic and cultural health. From *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 to a report from the most recent meeting (August, 1986) of the National Governors' Association, a long succession of re-

ports and studies both criticizing and offering suggestions for improving the educational system have appeared. Of late, the public focus has been on higher education; how have college and university presidents responded, reactively or proactively?

The Changing Policy Tide

Beginning with the GI Bill, gaining momentum with the National Defense Education Act in 1959, and culminating with the full implementation of the Great Society initiatives in the 1970s, the driving force behind educational improvement in the United States was the nation's capital. Coinciding with the peak of federal involvement was the proliferation of higher education associations, mostly located in Washington, D.C., and the creation of the Education Commission of the States, a state-sponsored national think tank designed to balance growing federal influence over local and state operated education programs. However, by the late 1970s, just a few years after its creation, even the ECS itself was substantially under federal influence, as federal grants and contracts represented some 90 percent of its total budget.

Nevertheless, by 1981, it was clear that the federal government was good at broadening access to educational opportunities but not very effective at enhancing educational quality. A new national focus on the necessity of improving educational quality, coupled with the general realization of the federal government's limitations, has shifted emphasis to the important role of state governments in educational improvement. The state's role was further enhanced by long-term changes in the economy, punctuated by a major national recession in 1982-83. The creation of jobs, interstate competition, and the international economy are now of paramount concern to governors, and the growing belief in education's importance in economic development has further intensified state concern with educational improvement.

Leadership

Thus, with the spotlight on the states and their chief executives, two important facts have been clearly documented in this study. The first is been the emergence of the Education Commission of the States as an information clearinghouse and policy formulation and research arm for the states. Second in importance is the development of special educational policy staff assistants in most governors' offices. ECS's growing importance to the states plus the limited influence of state higher education leaders raise the specter of failed university leadership. The question is: why?

To shed some light on this problem, interviews were conducted with experienced political leaders to help analyze the preliminary findings from the survey. A recent former governor, a state legislator, and a congressman were interviewed, and they provided essential insights expanding our thinking on the subject.

It is possible to characterize the ECS, and the NGA—in certain aspects—as think tanks not unlike the national policy think tanks such as the Brookings and American Enterprise Institutes and the Heritage Foundation, which have grown up around Washington, D.C. In the 1980s, these organizations are where much of the cogent thinking about national problems and policies occurs, not in those institutions traditionally responsible for such analysis in American society. On the other hand, recent growth in gubernatorial staffs parallels the growth of the White House staff over the past twenty-five/thirty years.

At the national level (and perhaps at the state level also) it seems that think tanks are more highly regarded as independent generators of ideas than universities. It also seems that federal executive staffs are now given more trust in sorting out and implementing ideas and policies than agencies and institutions. The evidence from our survey indicates that a parallel trend is developing at the state level.

Why are university leaders not playing a larger role on both the national and state levels at this crucial point in higher education's history? Are they beaten down by the conflicting demands of their institutions? Is the presidency attracting a different type of person today than in the past? If the answer to any one of these questions is "yes," then something of value has been lost and much more of the enterprise is at risk.

Suggestions for the Higher Education Community

The old axiom "perception is reality" is an important one for university leaders to remember in an era when decisions made at the state capital are increasingly important to higher education. If colleges and universities seem detached from state issues and appear preoccupied with their own concerns, and if higher education

leaders are perceived as coming to the state capital with their hands out, only interested in grabbing the money and running, then why should governors (and legislators) not look to more independent and less self-centered institutions and individuals for ideas, programs, and policies—even for those involving higher education?

If higher education leaders believe that being a team member in the global stakes game now being played out (to a significant extent) in the state capitals is important, new strategies must be developed and initiated. However, any such strategies should be built around one overriding principle. The American higher education system is a major national resource, one that must be perceived and used as a primary force for the common good, and college and university leaders must work to include societal needs as they go about developing their institutions—and must be seen as doing so. To this end, the authors suggest the following:

- College and university leaders must pay more attention to broader state issues. Concern with the long-term health of their states—economic, political, social, environmental, as well as educational— should be a constant preoccupation of colleges and their leaders. Obviously, without a healthy state, higher education will wither, private institutions hardly less than public.
- Colleges and universities have an enormous capacity for generating new ideas and approaches to state issues and concerns. In many cases, all it takes is simply making faculty aware that state issues are of concern to their institution's leaders for attention to be sufficiently refocused on generating relevant ideas. Administrators can stimulate this process by identifying and reinforcing faculty energy devoted to state issues.

  In other cases, colleges and universities may want to formally structure such a process through a public policy center or institute, or something similar. In addition, institutions can focus on giving preference in recruiting to faculty who have interest and expertise in state policy making and issues.
- An institution's public image can be shaped, in part, by having its president use the executive office to speak out on public issues. In doing so, however, presidents must avoid taking sides on partisan issues. Nevertheless, they should speak out, write newspaper columns, and communicate privately with state leaders on occasion, always seeking to educate, and to provide alternatives.
- In their interactions with state governments, colleges and universities should consider a team-oriented approach. Faculty can identify issues, offer ideas and advise boards, task forces, staffs, and elected officials. However, presidents, vice presidents, deans, staff, and board members can all be productive team members by cultivating individual relationships, offering ideas, and gathering information on state issues via contacts with appropriate persons in state government.
- College and university presidents must get involved with think tanks engaged in studying state issues and the information exchange forums represented by the Education Commission of the States, the National Governors' Association, and the Southern Regional Education Board. ECS's dramatic revitalization emphasizes not only the increased importance of the states, but also the intense desire of governors and legislators for information and ideas on higher education. Educators must be involved where education policy changes originate—increasingly this means the think tanks.
- More attention must be focused on the rapidly developing gubernatorial executive (and legislative) staffs. Titles may differ—secretary of education, policy analyst, or special assistant. However, in almost every state, a new cadre of professionals is developing, and the role and importance of these new technocrats must not be underestimated. Not only are these staffers technically competent, but they also represent an important link in the new information loops developing at the state capitals. While many of these information loops are informal, they are as important as the formal ones. Educators must tap into both formal and informal loops.
- College and university leaders should focus on publications read by policy makers instead of those only read by other higher educators. By focusing, we are suggesting reading, discussing, and, most importantly, informing.
- Academic institutions, through various policy centers and departments, can prepare and publish timely articles and books on public is-

sues, including educational issues that state executive and legislative leaders will have to deal with. The focus should be on identifying issues, tracing their evolution, and analyzing alternative solutions. George Mason University is engaged in such an effort at the present time. A similar study was done in California not long ago.

Finally, it seems that defining the interface and basic relationships between public institutions and their states is different in the 1980s, and is of growing importance. The states have taken on a growing role in economic development, social programs, and education; a new type of governor—younger, more aggressive and more determined, and epitomized by Robert Graham of Florida, Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, Thomas Kean of New Jersey, and Bruce Babbitt of Arizona—is taking charge and making things happen; and, new policy information and decision loops featuring staff assistants, task forces, and national organizations are taking shape. The combining of these forces means that higher education must create a new leadership role for itself, addressing broader social and economic issues at the state level.

This also means that, in addition to asserting leadership in the pursuit of academic excellence and the control of athletic programs, college and university presidents must stand tall in the state policy area. If they do so in a determined and constructive manner, American higher education can once again take a seat in the new inner circle charting America's course in the states. American institutions and our society will reinforce the historical symbiotic relationship between town and gown, a relationship which mutually benefits and enriches—and, is crucial to the health and growth of both.

States whose Governors Responded to Survey

Responding yes:

Alabama
Alaska
Arkansas
Connecticut
Colorado
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Illinois
Idaho
Iowa
Indiana
Kansas
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New Mexico
North Carolina
North Dakota
Oregon
Rhode Island
South Carolina
Utah
Vermont
Washington
Wisconsin
Wyoming

Responding no:

Montana
Pennsylvania
Arizona (referred)

About the Authors

J. Wade Gilley, senior vice president and a professor in both education and systems engineering departments at George Mason University, has served as secretary of education in Virginia and as a college president for eleven years. With a Ph.D. in engineering from Virginia Tech, Gilley has published widely on environmental and biochemical engineering systems and on public policy and higher education. He was the principal researcher and co-author of *Searching for Academic Excellence* (Macmillan, 1986), *Administration of University Athletic Programs: Internal Control and Excellence* (ACE/GMU, 1986), and a number of other education policy studies.

Kenneth A. Fulmer holds the Ph.D. from Stanford University and is currently assistant senior vice president for governmental affairs at George Mason University. Fulmer is also a co-author of *Searching for Academic Excellence* and has been actively associated with several of the research projects of the GMU Center for Policy Studies in Education. He is active in public policy forums in the state capital and in Washington, D. C.

Recent Projects of the Center for Policy Studies in Education, George Mason University

- *Searching for Academic Excellence* (Gilley, Fulmer and Reithlingshoefer) (ACE/Macmillan, 1986)
- *Administration of university athletic programs* (Gilley and Hickey) (GMU/ACE, 1986)
- *A question of leadership: or, to whom are the governors listening?* (Gilley and Fulmer) (CPSE, 1986)
- *High technology in Virginia*, (Gilley) (CPSE, 1984)
- *Public attitudes toward the public schools: results from a statewide survey* (Gilley and Crain) (CPSE, 1985)
- *A report on Virginia attitudes toward higher education: results from a statewide survey* (Gilley and Crain) (CPSE, 1985)
- *Economic development in Southwest Virginia* (Gilley) (CPSE, 1986)